

CHILDREN'S EMOTIONS

Children often have strong emotions due to their developing brains. They may have a limited ability to understand and regulate emotions, and potential sensitivities. They may also be triggered by things like tiredness, hunger, overwhelming situations, or by not being able to express their needs effectively.

Brain Development:

At this age the brain is still maturing, especially the parts related to emotional regulation.

This means that while a child is experiencing a wide range of emotions, they haven't yet developed the ability to manage those feelings effectively, leading to meltdowns or tantrums.

Sensory Sensitivity:

Some children are naturally more sensitive to their environment and experiences. They may react more intensely to sounds, lights, or other stimuli, leading to emotional outbursts.

Lack of Skills:

Children at this age might not have developed the skills to effectively communicate their needs or handle frustrating situations.

This can include impulse control, problem-solving, and the ability to wait for things.

External Factors:

Environment and experiences can also contribute to strong emotions.

Stressful situations, such as parental arguments, changes in routines or inconsistent boundaries, can make a child more vulnerable to emotional reactions.

Emotional Dysregulation:

Some children struggle with emotional dysregulation - they have a hard time managing their emotions and can react with intense outbursts.

By understanding these factors, we can better support a child's emotional development and help them learn to manage their feelings in healthy ways.

We can help children identify and name their emotions, practice calming techniques, and develop strategies for coping with challenging situations.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD THROUGH AN EMOTIONAL OUTBURST

Supporting a child during an emotional outburst involves validating their feelings, offering a safe space to calm down, and helping them understand and regulate their emotions. It's crucial to avoid reinforcing negative behaviours and instead focus on encouraging healthy coping mechanisms.

Why Validation is Important:

It helps children learn to regulate their emotions and express their feelings effectively.

It builds a sense of safety and security, as the child knows they can be heard and understood.

It strengthens the parent-child relationship by fostering empathy and understanding.

It allows the child to feel seen and heard, helping them feel confident and secure in their relationships.

The following, if done consistently, can be really effective in supporting children.

1. Validate Their Feelings:

Acknowledge their emotions:

Let your child know you understand they're feeling upset, angry, or frustrated. For example, you could say, "I can see you're really upset right now" or "It's okay to feel angry".

Use empathy:

Try to understand what's making them feel this way. Ask questions like, "What happened?" or "What's making you feel this way?".

2. Create a Safe Space:

Give them space:

Sometimes, children need time alone to calm down. Offer them a quiet area or a chance to sit by themselves.

Model calmness:

Stay calm yourself. Children often mirror the emotions of adults around them, so try to remain composed during the outburst.

3. Help Them Regulate:

Teach coping strategies:

Encourage them to use techniques like deep breathing, counting to 10, or taking a break from the situation.

Help them identify triggers:

Work together to figure out what situations or events might be triggering their outbursts.

Practice emotional regulation:

Teach them how to name their emotions and express them in a healthy way.

4. Avoid Reinforcing Outbursts:

Don't give in:

Resist the urge to give them what they want to stop the outburst. This reinforces the behaviour.

Ignore minor misbehaviour:

If the outburst is minor, consider ignoring it or offering a gentle redirection.

Praise positive behaviour:

When they start to calm down or express their feelings in a healthy way, praise their efforts.

CONSEQUENCES

Consequences for a child should be age-appropriate, logical, and consistent with the misbehaviour. They should also emphasize learning and making amends rather than solely punishing.

Appropriate consequences

Below are some examples of appropriate consequences

Positive Reinforcement:

Verbal praise: Recognize and acknowledge good behaviour with words of encouragement.

Logical Consequences:

Time-out: A short period of time alone, free from attention or activities, can help a child calm down and reflect on their behaviour. The time-out should be age-appropriate (e.g., 1-2 minutes per year of age).

Time-in: Young children can benefit from having an adult beside them. Limit conversation to phrases such as, “I can see this is really hard for you right now.” “We’ll get through this together.”

Loss of privileges: Taking away a favourite toy or activity for a short period can be a consequence for misbehaviour.

Natural consequences: Allowing a child to experience the natural outcome of their actions can be a powerful learning tool.

Making amends: If a child damages something or hurts someone's feelings, they can be given the opportunity to fix it or apologize.

Things to Avoid:

Physical punishment: Hitting, slapping, or using other physical methods of discipline can be harmful and ineffective.

Threats and intimidation: Use calm and clear communication when explaining consequences.

Punishing for things they can't control: A young child may not be able to fully regulate their emotions or understand the consequences of their actions.

Key Considerations:

Consistency:

It's important to follow through with consequences consistently to help a child understand what is expected of them.

Clarity:

Explain the consequences clearly and simply, in a way that a young child can understand.

Timing:

Apply consequences as soon as possible after the misbehaviour to help a child make the connection between their actions and the result.

Positive relationships:

A strong, positive parent-child relationship can help a child respond more effectively to discipline.

Remember, every child is different. It's important to be flexible and adjust your approach based on your child's individual needs and personality. However, consistency is key and the approach will take time to work.